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PhD defense, Aalborg University, 29 april 2011

Agustin, Lise Rolandsen

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FREIA

Feminist Research Center
in Aalborg
Aalborg University
Kroghstraede 3
DK-9220 Aalborg East

Phone: +45 9940 8310

E-mail: freia@cgs.aau.dk #

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Lise Rolandsen Agustín

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The Research Secretariat
FREIA & Department of Culture and Global Studies
Kroghstraede 3-3.243
Aalborg University
DK-9220 Aalborg East
Denmark
Tel. + 45 9940 8310

E-mail: freia@cgs.aau.dk
Homepage: <http://www.freia.cgs.aau.dk>

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Foreword

This working paper is a slightly reworked version of the manuscript for the defense of my PhD dissertation, entitled Gender Equality and Diversity at the Transnational Level. Challenges to European Union policy-making and women's collective mobilization. The defense took place at Aalborg University on 29 april 2011.

Despite a considerable amount of nerves in the weeks prior to the defense, the day in itself turned out to be an enjoyable and positive experience. This was not least due to the committee appointed to assess the dissertation and conduct the defense. Johanna Kantola (Associate Professor, Helsinki University), Myra Marx Ferree (Professor, Wisconsin University) and Henrik Halkier (Professor, Aalborg University) provided inspiring input, thoughtful comments and critique, and an atmosphere which invited to true dialogue and debate on the issues treated in the dissertation. I am very grateful to all of them for their contribution and constructive attitude. I would also like to thank moderator Knud Knudsen (Associate Professor, Aalborg University) for his role, chairing the defense.

Contributing to creating a wonderful setting for the defense were also my close colleagues at the Feminist Research Centre at Aalborg University (FREIA). This concerns not least my supervisors Birte Siim and Anette Borchorst who throughout the process have been tremendously supportive and helping me in all ways possible. The long-distance support from Emanuela Lombardo and Silke Roth, who each co-wrote articles, which were included in the dissertation, with me has been invaluable; I am very grateful for having been able to rely on our common work, also in the defense of the dissertation.

Thanks are also due to my colleagues at the Department of Culture and Global Studies for their interest and support and to Daniel Gustafsson and Diana Højlund Madsen for lending a hand with all the necessary practicalities in relation to the defense. Similarly I want to thank Marianne Høgsbro for professionally attending to the administrative tasks.

Support, thoughts, advice and encouragement from friends and family were much appreciated, whether they were able to be physically present at the defense or not. As always my parents took care of many practical things in order to let me focus on preparing for the big event; so did my husband, Óscar, who furthermore was the 'chosen one' for numerous and, at times, disastrous rehearsals of the initial presentation for the defense. Thank you for your patience, thoughtful reflections on improvements, and confidence.

Lise Rolandsen Agustín, February 2012

Gender Equality and Diversity at the Transnational Level

PhD defense, Aalborg University, 29 april 2011

Lise Rolandsen Agustín

Introduction

In this presentation I would like to outline the main findings of my PhD dissertation. The dissertation is entitled Gender Equality and Diversity at the Transnational Level. Challenges to European Union policy-making and women's collective mobilization. I first present the aim of the dissertation, namely identifying and analyzing the main challenges to the development of gender equality policies and the representation of women's interests in the context of the European Union. Then I turn to the methodological and theoretical basis. And finally I address each of the challenges identified separately and set forward conclusions on the implications of the findings. I will illustrate these findings with examples from the empirical analyses which I have carried out.

Challenges to the development of EU gender equality policies

As mentioned, in the dissertation I address two of the main challenges to the development of EU gender equality policies and women's collective mobilization at the transnational, European level in the last two decades. These are degendering of policies, on the one hand, and the diversity of women's interests, on the other.

The dissertation is structured in two main parts. Part 1 is monographic and addresses the challenge of degendering. It analyses the development of EU policies on violence against women from the late 70s to the end of the 2000s and focuses in particular on the institutionalization of frames in processes of policy negotiation. Part 2 consists of five articles.¹ Each article focuses on an aspect of

¹ The articles which are included as a part of the PhD dissertation are: Emanuela Lombardo & Lise Rolandsen Agustín (forthcoming): "Framing gender intersections in the European Union: what implications for the quality of intersectionality in policies?". Social Politics; Lise Rolandsen Agustín (2008): "Civil Society Participation in EU Gender Policy-Making: Framing Strategies and Institutional Constraints". Parliamentary Affairs, 61(3), 505-517; Lise Rolandsen Agustín (2012): "(Re)defining women's interests? Political struggles over women's collective representation in the

the diversity challenge. This concerns the growing number of women's organizations mobilizing at the transnational level and the diversity of women's interests and demands within this empirical space. Whereas part 1 focuses on framing processes in transnational policy-making, part 2 addresses claims-making in transnational civil society.

The two parts of the dissertation are bound together by a common focus on recent developments of the field of EU gender equality policies since the introduction of Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty. Article 13 envisages EU action in terms of combating six grounds of discrimination. These are sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation. The antidiscrimination article has resulted in increased attention to diversity concerns and the interrelation between multiple grounds of discrimination. The common themes of the two parts of the dissertation are gender equality policies, the transnational space of mobilization as well as EU institutions.

The CFA methodology adapted

The dissertation builds on two kinds of empirical material; one is policy documents from the three main EU institutions, namely the Commission, the Parliament and the Council, as well as document material from seven European women's organizations operating at the transnational level. Another set of empirical material is elite interviews conducted with EU officials and politicians as well as leading representatives from European women's organizations. All in all 28 elite interviews are included in the analysis.

These two kinds of empirical material each serve a different purpose in the analysis. The documents are used as the basis for critical frame analysis. They reflect development, shifts and contestations between key actors' articulation of frames in policy-making processes. The interviews, on the other hand, are used to contextualize the critical frame analysis of the documents and, in this way, uncover actors' strategies, conflicts between actors and frames as well as silences or unarticulated ideas.

context of the European Parliament". *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 19(1), 23-40; Lise Rolandsen Agustín & Silke Roth (2011): "Minority Inclusion, Self Representation and Coalition-Building. The Participation of Minority Women in European Women's Networks". In: J.-M. Bonvin, M. Renom & A. Woodward (eds): *Transforming Gendered Well-Being in Europe: The Impact of Social Movements*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 231-247; and Lise Rolandsen Agustín (2010): "Diversity Claims-Making in a Transnational Space of Mobilization: the Intersections of Gender and Ethnicity". *Kvinder, Køn og Forskning*, 2, 74-83.

During my PhD I have had the privilege to collaborate with the researchers of the QUING project which is a large European project financed by the European Commission (quing.eu). It analyses gender equality policies in the EU member states as well as the EU level. The QUING project builds on critical frame analysis as its methodological approach (Dombos et al. 2009; Lombardo et al. 2009; Verloo 2005; 2007). I am inspired by this approach in my dissertation though I have also chosen to adapt it to my particular field of study and the scope of my research. I want to briefly outline the main ideas of critical frame analysis as well as the adaption of the approach that I made.

I consider frame analysis to be a particular kind of discursive policy analysis. A policy frame can be defined as a configuration of ideas articulating a specific representation of a policy problem (Verloo 2005). The frames structure the meaning of events, actions or experiences so that we can make sense of reality (Goffman 1974; Squires 2006). Critical frame analysis focuses on the articulation of proposals and demands in policy documents and in policy-making processes. Three dimensions of the policy texts are analyzed. These are diagnosis, prognosis and voice. Each of these dimensions is divided into a set of frame markers (Verloo 2005). In the dissertation I focus particularly on strategic framing of policy ideas. I differentiate frames from discourses by emphasizing the element of intentionality: according to Bacchi (2005: 204), frames are the “conscious shaping of political demands”. Discourses, on the other hand, are conceptualized as general ideational frameworks or the underlying logic upon which frames are constructed (Ferre & Merrill 2000). In other words, I argue that frames are employed strategically by political actors, drawing on discourses which are embedded in a specific institutional context. So, in the analysis I focus on agency and intentionality in the articulation of the frames (see also Bacchi 2005; Squires 2006; Verloo 2005; 2007).

I have adapted the critical frame analysis approach to better reflect the policy processes playing out. I argue for a strengthened focus on the contextualization of frames. I focus particularly on political and discursive opportunity structures (Ferre 2003; 2009; Kulawik 2009; Tarrow 1998; 2005) as well as interrelations between the key actors both within the EU and in transnational civil society. I underline these dimensions in order to interpret the role of ideas and the importance of agency in the development of policies.

Theoretical model for analysis

Theoretically the dissertation is informed by gendered discursive institutionalism (Kantola 2006; Kenny, 2007; Kenny & Mackay, 2009; Kulawik, 2009; Mackay & Meier, 2003; Schmidt 2008; 2011). It combines feminist

political analysis with new institutionalism by focusing on discourse, gender and policy-making. It addresses processes of continuity and change in the development of political institutions. I consider institutions to be constituted by ideas which are institutionalized as frames and discourses. The theoretical approach highlights the dimensions of power and collective agency which makes it adequate for the analysis of transnational mobilization of women.

I have adopted these theoretical reflections into a model for analyzing European Union policy-making (see figure 1 below) which is the purpose of the monographic part of the dissertation in particular. The model includes three main dimensions: ideas, agency and context. In the dissertation I argue that ideas, agency and context are interrelated dimensions in the dynamics of institutional and policy change (see also Ruzza 2004). The interaction between the dimensions is illustrated in the model through interrelated fields: 1) strategic framing, whereby actors make use of ideas in order to advance policy claims or interests, political and discursive opportunity structures. The latter either enhance or constrain the possibilities for articulating certain frames and of acting within the transnational political space (see also McAdam et al. 1996; Squires 2006; Verloo 2005; 2007); and 2) processes of in/exclusion based on asymmetrical power relations, whereby certain civil society actors are granted access to the policy-making processes or institutional sites of influence by being constituted as legitimate claims-makers in the eyes of the EU institutions (see also Jensen & Mahon 1993; Phillips 1999; Ruzza 2004; Squires 2007).

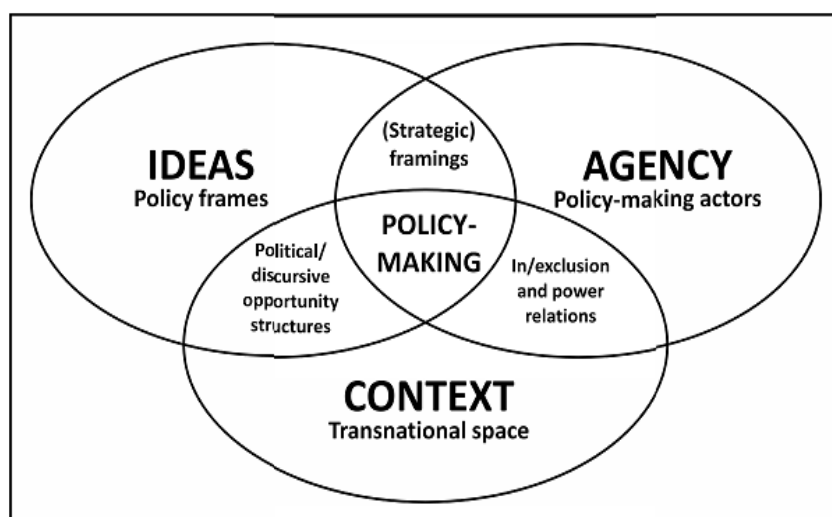


Figure 1. Theoretical model for analyzing European Union policy-making

Based on the empirical analysis undertaken in the dissertation, I argue that institutional processes of change and continuity are the result of the reproduction

of ideas. What matters is how ideas are institutionalized in specific contexts and settings. Policy development is possible, even in contexts which are institutionally and discursively constrained, through the way in which key actors articulate ideas as strategic framings.

Degendering

In the monographic part of the dissertation I analyze the development of policies on violence against women in the European Union. The main research question, applied to this part of the analysis, reads: *How are frames, as configurations of ideas, institutionalized in the development of gender-based violence policies of the European Union, and why are they institutionalized in this manner?* A number of subquestions follow from this. They address mainly the discursive shifts and contestations taking place during the process of institutionalization, the potential degendering of policies, the role of civil society organization and EU institutions as well as the opportunities and constraints of the institutional context in which the framing processes unfold.

Violence against women entered the policy agenda of the European Parliament in the late 70s. At that time it was articulated as a problem of structural gender inequality, like for example in the European Parliament Resolution on Violence against Women from 1986: “Violence against women is the sexualised expression of the oppression of women, the [economic] dependence of women, the difference in power between men and women” (A2-0044-86) (see figure 2 below for an identification of frame markers for the structural gender inequality frame). Later violence against women was linked to an international agenda which defined the problem as a violation of women’s human rights (Hoskyns, 1996; Kantola, 2006, 2010; Locher, 2007). In the late 90s the issue was institutionalized in Commission policies and in this process the DAPHNE programme on combating violence against women, children and young people was adopted. Since the European Union has no clear legal competence within this policy area, the issue of its legal basis was heavily debated (see also Locher 2007).

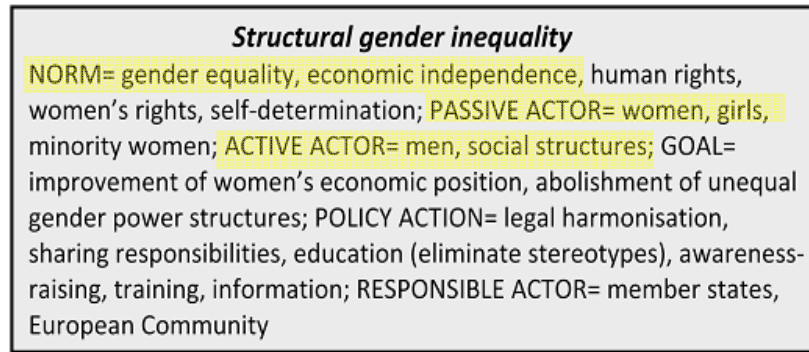


Figure 2. Salient frame markers of structural gender inequality

In the beginning, the Commission advocated for a general legal basis to legitimize EU-level action in areas where there were no direct competences. The Council found this to be too far reaching because it could be used as a precedence to advance EU competences in other areas as well. The appropriate legal basis needed to respect the division of competences between the EU institutions and the member states and so public health was chosen as the legal framework. Thus, the EP and Council Decision on the DAPHNE programme from 2000 reads:

Physical, sexual and psychological violence against children, young persons and women constitutes [...] a serious threat to the physical and mental health of the victims of such violence [...] It is important to recognise the serious immediate and longterm implications for health, psychological and social development, [...] and the high social and economic costs to society as a whole (293/2000/EC) (see figure 3 below for an identification of frame markers for the public health frame).

This legal framework had a more restricted focus in terms of gender but it is an area of EU competence and it was articulated with the clear aim of passing legislation in the area. The Parliament considered it impossible to advance in any other direction due to strong member state resistance and therefore the Parliament used the public health frame to a maximum by broadening its scope and articulating parallel human rights concerns. In other words, the Parliament used a strategy of degendering with the aim of advancing gender equality aims in practice.

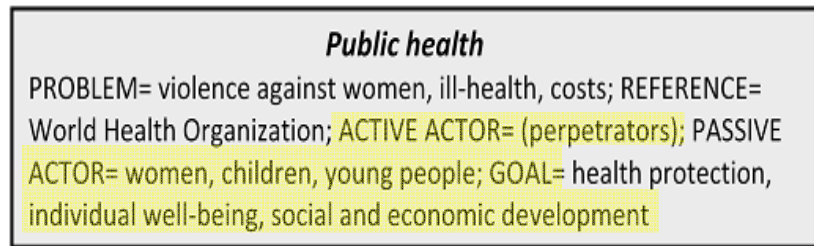


Figure 3. Salient frame markers of public health

The development of the policy area called for concern among gender activists and scholars as the issue was under threat of losing its gendered content (see Kantola 2010; Squires 2007). According to the relevant literature within the area, the lack of a clear legal basis led to processes of degendering (Locher 2007; Lombardo & Meier 2007; 2009; Mazey 2002).

Nevertheless my analyses shows that the public health frame was institutionalized in a weak manner: it was only used instrumentally as a vessel for strategic policy-making and therefore did not transcend into the implementation of the programme which, in this case, means selection of projects carried out by the European Commission with the view to allocate funding for NGO projects within the area. In the analysis I ask whether the increased attention to public health and economic and social costs of violence at the level of EU policies had implications for the selection of projects for funding under the DAPHNE programme in terms of (de)gendering. I find that public health is a weak frame in the project selections as it is rarely an important part of the problem representation. The most dominant frame is an implicit gender inequality frame which refers to women as victims along with a number of other victim groups. I therefore argue that the public health frame is not prevalent in the material and it does not spill over into the project selection in a significant way. Due to the reframing of the issue, policy measures were adopted and inserted into a legal text but the gendered understanding of the problem within the EU institutions in general prevailed. The interpretation that the European Commission makes of the legal framework is wide enough to also include gendered problem representations of violence. Here the violence is characterised as gender-specific in the sense that it is committed against women but it is not related to root causes such as asymmetrical power structures for example. I argue that whereas the public health frame did not transcend into the project selection in any significant way it did neutralise the structural concerns and problem perceptions related to dominance. It is a procedural rather than a normative frame in the sense that it was articulated due to reasons of competence.

Implications of the findings

I would like to reflect a bit upon the implications of the findings and I focus particularly on the notion of degendering. In policy analysis, policy gendering refers to the explicit articulation of gendered categories in policy texts or the consideration of structural gender inequality concerns. The term degendering, on the other hand, refers to processes whereby gender is ignored, silenced or excluded from policies which would be relevant to gender equality concerns. In other words, degendering occurs when gender disappears or is left out of certain policies altogether. Now, the reasons behind processes of degendering vary: policies may be degendered out of ignorance of the gender implications of the policy measures. This could also be conceptualized as gender-blindness. It may also occur due to specific policy agendas which do not wish to attend to gender due to the economic costs of these measures. Or it may be the result of a strategic choice not to include gender explicitly in policies even though there is an implicit aim to target problems related to gender inequality. In other words, a gender equality agenda may, at times, be best advanced by modifying the frames strategically and not explicitly articulating gender dimensions. The obvious risk is that the implicit gendered content might get lost in the processes of policy implementation (Krizsan et al. 2005; 2007; Lombardo et al. 2009; Lombardo & Meier 2009).

Although degendering is often taken as a problematic development because the explicit aim of gender equality is in risk of dilution, the case study of the development of EU policies on violence against women shows that it is necessary to take into account the particular context and circumstances according to which the processes of degendering take place.

On a methodological level the analysis of the DAPHNE programme illustrates the significance of policy frames and their scope of institutionalization. I find that framings to a large extent coexist simultaneously in the institutional policies and contexts.

This leads me to put forward another set of conclusions. First of all, the case highlights the importance of attending to the differences between the EU institutions. The Commission holds the power of interpretation in many cases as they intervene between the adoption of legal texts and their implementation, in this case the selection of projects for funding. The framings of the Commission do not necessarily correspond with those of the Parliament and the Council and this becomes apparent in such cases.

Furthermore I underline the need to interpret frames in relation to the institutional context with which they interact. In particular I argue that strategic framing takes place in the foreground of institutional policies in relation to

dominant discourses whereas the reproduction of marginal frames occurs in the background of policies through discursive day-to-day practices as well as in soft policies without binding measures. Frames will appear in the institutional foreground or the institutional background depending on the way in which they have been institutionalized.² I characterise the public health frame as a strategic dominant foreground frame which was weakly institutionalised in that it appears almost exclusively in the legislative policy process but it hardly transcends into implementation practices. The structural gender equality frame is a strong background frame; it cannot be articulated in the foreground for strategic reasons but it is constantly reproduced in the discursive practices and policies of the European Commission and other EU institutions.

As the institutionalisation of ideas as frames is continuous and dynamic, frames can nevertheless move from one sphere to the other. In addition, it is important to keep in mind, when looking at the development of frames and the relative strength between them, that the foreground frames of the legal texts may persist longer whereas the background frames are more vulnerable and susceptible to changes in actor constellations, and political climate and will. In conclusion, I argue for the importance of highlighting the complexity of simultaneous framings, their relative strength and the different scope of institutionalization.

Multiple discrimination and the challenge of diversity

Now I would like to turn to the article-based part of the dissertation. As mentioned this part addresses the diversity challenge that European women's organizations mobilizing at the transnational level face. I analyze the potential of the transnational civil society in terms of defining and representing the diversity of women's collective interests vis-à-vis the European Union.

The transnational space of mobilization has developed in interaction with the EU institutions. The transnational space is characterized by multiple levels of interaction and it provides new opportunities for civil society actors since they can direct their demands towards different levels of policy-making (Helfferich & Kolb 2001; Lang 2009; Woodward 2006).

² The terms foreground and background are used by Goffmann (1974), and they resonate with the notions of public and hidden transcripts developed by Scott (1999). Even though the latter relates to a different framework (i.e. relations of domination and resistance among dominant and subordinated groups in society), I find his ideas useful to reflect upon frame nuances in institutional contexts as well. Scott (Ibid.) argues that discourses are articulated between dominant and dominated groups both publicly (public transcript) and privately (hidden transcript). The dominated or subordinated groups act in certain ways in public in order to please the dominant groups and use the discursive width in private to articulate resistances (see also García Agustín, 2010).

Earlier I referred to the introduction of the multiple discrimination approach in EU policies. In terms of activism, this can be considered as an opportunity because it makes it possible to address intersectional constituencies in a more adequate manner and develop gender equality policies which address the concerns of different women. However, as was the case with degendering, multiple discrimination also implies a threat for women's organizations at the European level as gender may be marginalized as other inequalities are taken into consideration by policy-makers (see Lombardo & Meier 2009; Lombardo et al. 2009; Schwenken 2009; Verloo et al. 2007; Woodward 2006; 2007).

Transnational activism around gender equality issues has proliferated in recent years, and this transnational space of mobilization is characterized by a high degree of diversity (Woodward 2007; Woodward & Wiercx 2003). Within this landscape the well-established European Women's Lobby holds a privileged position as the main interlocutor of the EU institutions and especially the European Commission (see also Pudrovska & Ferree 2004; Strid 2009). However, the European Women's Lobby is challenged by: 1) other umbrella organizations focusing on other grounds of discrimination; 2) organizations with minority intersectional constituencies; and 3) organizations with an ideologically different and more conservative understanding of gender equality. The members of these organizations do not feel represented by the European Women's Lobby.

I want to highlight three sets of findings in particular from my analysis of the diversity of women's mobilization in the transnational space.

The first refers to processes of inclusion and exclusion. Despite the flourishing of transnational civil society action, significant constraints are placed on the articulation of demands and input into EU institutions. First of all, transnational mobilization is still very much an elitist form of action since it is mostly resourceful, privileged groups which are able to act at this level (Bretherton & Sperling 1996; Hoskyns 1996; Kantola 2010). I also argue that the EU institutions define 'legitimate claims-makers' through processes of inclusion and exclusion whereby some actors are granted access and voice whereas others are not. The European Commission in particular participates in the definition of who should be considered legitimate interlocutors at the transnational level. A pluralisation of claims is not prioritized and the European Commission prefers a single voice representing women's interests. In this process there is a risk of marginalizing minority voices. In general, the legitimate claims are the ones fitting the institutional frame and not the ones resulting from deliberative processes, for instance, which could on the other hand be considered as the potential contribution of civil society actors in terms of adding legitimacy to EU actions. Civil society organizations inscribe gender equality goals into an economic discourse for instance in order for the frame to resonate with the EU

focus on labour market participation and economic growth. In general, this reasoning is considered wise in order to gain influence:

Of course the argument that there is a social cost and an economic cost to the problem is a strong one, because the European Union is still predominantly an economic arrangement [...] and social questions [are] the poor cousin still [...] so if you come up with economic arguments then that I think is something that this machinery here can understand [...] It's a good tactic, if you like, looking at it that way – at the EU level (Council official, General Secretariat, interview May 2010).

The second finding concerns the struggle over the meaning of women's interests. Dominant discourses can be questioned through the inclusion of new civil society actors allying themselves with institutional actors. Diverse understandings of gender equality and women's interests are set forward for instance within the context of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality of the European Parliament. This Committee has been considered a feminist stronghold which has given priority to the European Women's Lobby mainly but it has turned into an important site of struggle over the definition of women's interests. The family-oriented organization New Women for Europe has allied itself with conservative members of the European Parliament: "It is high time we broke with an ideological vision of woman's place in society [...] It is not right for a handful of women, expert in making claims of society and living on intravenous injections of public monies, to monopolise the role of speaking on behalf of women" (Thomas-Mauro, UEN, European Parliament debate, 23 October 2000). New Women for Europe defend women's right to choose whether or not to opt for a career-centered or a home-centered path and they oppose abortion. In this way they challenge the dominant gender equality understanding of the European Union, which primarily focuses on women's labour market participation. This results in a renewed discursive struggle and reinterpretation of women's interests and the meaning of gender equality within the context of the European Union.

The third finding refers to the representation and recognition of minority intersectional constituencies. The Black European Women's Council, for instance, feels that the needs and interests of black European women are not adequately represented by the well-established umbrella organizations:

If we agree that we are so diversified and that one, two, three organizations are, honestly, not in a position to represent the needs of the diversity we have, then people will automatically see that the emergence of self-organised networks is absolutely necessary [...] When we start doing this it's because we realise that we are Europeans, we're living in a European context, we identify with the structures (Black European Women's Council representative, interview November 2008).

Thus, the Black European Women's Council advocates for minority women's self representation and aim to be included into European society as citizens as well as being recognized as legitimate interlocutors of the EU institutions.

Concluding remarks

I conclude that the legitimization of civil society organizations is linked to discursive struggles over meaning. The understanding of gender equality and women's interests is contested and there is a struggle playing out over who should represent women's diverse interests in the transnational sphere. A heterogeneous group of women claims institutional recognition through transnational mobilization and cooperation and competition coexist between the organizations. However, the empirical diversity of women's interests is not responded institutionally and inclusive policy-making is not prioritized, in part due to a lack of human and financial resources.

So, in conclusion, just like the case analysis of the policies on violence against women showed the need to balance between political will and legal constraints and both degendering and economic framings of gender equality goals entail a balance between strategic concerns and the risk of dilution, the diversity of women's claims calls for a reconsideration of the balance between policy-making efficiency and pluralism of demands. The EU institutions have yet to come up with a solution for the complex inclusion of the diversity of interests and claims articulated in the transnational civil society.

I advocate for an enhancement of inclusive policy-making processes in order to reflect the empirical reality of diversity institutionally. There is a need for recognizing diversity both in terms of mobilization and empowerment of minority groups (the self representation of minority women) and as regards policy agendas (recognition of minority women as interlocutors in policy-making and as target groups of policies). The question is how to address gender and diversity in practice in relation to collective mobilization and democratic inclusion (of diverse concerns) into policy-making processes. Inclusive policy-

making covers policy and institutional dimensions as well as organisational and empowerment-related dimensions. In a transnational model of democracy, attention to diversity must be strengthened both in terms of contestations over policy meanings (women's interests) and collective mobilization (women's organisations). The transnational space opens new possibilities for women's collective mobilisation but it also tends towards exclusion of minority voices due to the policy-making structures (prevalence of elite groups, institutional advocacy or lobbying, efficiency over plurality and representative logic before deliberation).

Diverse women's groups' mobilization is a form of resistance against this tendency: contestation and deliberation (civil society) counteract the tendency towards exclusive interest representation and efficiency in civil society interaction with EU institutions. There is, however, a mismatch between the practices and discourses of transnational women's movements and the corresponding institutional structures with which they seek to interact. The institutions play a crucial role in facilitating and encouraging expressions of diversity and their translation into the institutional realm. Empowerment through articulation of diversified voices should be combined with the restructuring of current institutions with the view of addressing more adequately and in an inclusive manner the needs and demands emerging from multiple inequalities.

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